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Anna Bravo, *A colpi di cuore. Storie del sessantotto*, Roma-Bari, Gius. Laterza & Figli, 2008, 322 pages, 9 788842085881, Euro 15,00, soft cover.

In this fascinating book Anna Bravo rises to the challenge of the dilemma she outlines in her 'Introduzione': who is better equipped to write about such a highly charged year as 1968? Those who 'were there', whose memories of 1968 are clouded by the emotions that accompanied the experience, and forty years on are bound occasionally to fall prey to nostalgia, or those who, not having taken part, enjoy the benefit of distance but are perhaps unable to convey the spirit of the time? An *ex-sessantottina* and member of 'Lotta continua' herself, Bravo seems to overcome the difficulty of her predicament by striving for plurality on a number of levels.

The book has a strong basis in the personal experience of those who participated in the struggles, though its 'oral history' component consists of already published testimonies. The contemporary perspective is provided primarily by the author. Yet, the book does not present itself as 'life writing': Bravo's own experience is understated but is clearly heard in the ease and lucidity with which she moves among her sources and re-examines the myriad facets of 1968. It thus emerges that the word *storie* in the subtitle alludes to the impossibility of constraining into one hi/story the multifarious 1968, both the Italian one and the many 1968s that happened around the world. The full title renders perfectly the hybrid nature of a book on the 'long 1968' that draws on documents from the period (slogans, posters, images, songs), testimonies and Bravo's own memories, reassessing them in the light of historical, sociological, philosophical and political research on Italy and other countries that has accumulated up to 2008.

What seems to drive Bravo's narration is precisely the need to reconstruct as variegated a picture of 1968 as the constraints inherent in a project rooted in the double awareness that 'l'esserci stato' does not guarantee truth and that it is impossible to say 'tutto' (p. 13) would allow. Indeed, Bravo's analysis could not yield a different picture, given the centrality she attributes to the practice of *partire da sé* as the method of analysis adopted by both groups on whom she has chosen to focus, youth/students and women: personal experience and subjectivity, which were disavowed in traditional politics, are the locus in which the thrust towards change originates and the political struggle must start. Bravo thus weaves a rich tapestry in which words, positions and actions are scrutinized from numerous angles. As a result, we are not presented with an ordered synthesis of events and a hard academic elucidation of the ideas and ideologies of 1968, but with a meandering yet close-knit narrative that attempts to conjure up the period through an analysis of its minute components and by focusing on behaviours, mores and mindsets. The aim is to question what have traditionally been seen as the conquests and failures of 1968.

A colpi di cuore consists of an 'Introduzione' and eight chapters. The first four chapters — 'Radici. I', 'Radici. II', 'Politiche' and 'Politiche del femminismo' — alternate between youth/students and women. Each of the remaining four is devoted to a theme and deals with both groups: 'Amore', 'Dolore', 'Stregate', 'Violenza'. All chapters follow the pattern of moving between the larger international context and Italy, to identify the indebtedness of the Italian movements to foreign ones — primarily the countercultures and civil rights movements of the United States and the French 1968 — as well as their specificity. The chapters are subdivided into short titled sections: this

enables the author to tackle the diversity and richness of the period, even though it occasionally leads to a certain fragmentation.

Bravo relentlessly demonstrates the fallacy of certain views of 1968, thus redimensioning or giving new value to some of its aspects and legacies. In 'Radici. I', the notion that young people and students were making a clean sheet with the past and had no ancestors or models is challenged by Bravo's finding the roots of rebellion already in the 1950s. 'Radici. II' counters the idea that the feminist movement was born within and from the student movement by drawing an articulated picture of the malaise affecting women already in the 1950s and early 1960s as a consequence of modernization. 'Politiche' looks at how the implicit universalism of the student movement, whereby social, cultural, religious, ethnic, class, and gender differences and allegiances were seen as irrelevant to the struggle and were thus relegated to the private sphere, contradicts one of the most important theorization of 1968, the interconnection between public and private. Bravo points out the ensuing exclusion from the movements of those who did not fit into the accepted typology, but also the losses, in qualifications, career and private life, suffered by those who got involved. 'Politiche del femminismo' contests the notion of women's presence within politics simply as *angeli del ciclostile*: it was rather that neither parties nor movements recognized their contribution, blind as they were to women and sexual difference. Bravo also draws attention to the contradiction between the idea held by many at the time that in 1968 politics became feminized (in opposing the male/rationalistic/abstract model of politics) and the persistent lack of interest in women and female values by the student movements. This was a missed opportunity to really implement some of the ideas

underpinning the latter: the practice of *partire da sé*, the sexual revolution, the abolition of the public/private dichotomy.

The ‘thematic’ chapters are closely intertwined. Abortion, for example, comes up in ‘Amore’, ‘Dolore’ and ‘Violenza’ and, indirectly, in ‘Stregate’, in relation to the sexual revolution, as a source of suffering, as an act of violence and with reference to the right to life of ‘anomalous’ children. In ‘Dolore’, Bravo provides a poignant deconstruction of women’s attitudes to and testimonies of abortion at the time, attempting to bring to light what was left unsaid. ‘Violenza’, dealing with violence against women and the armed struggle, demolishes the notion that 1970s terrorism was a natural development of the methods of the students’ and workers’ struggles and the belief in the possibility of remaining innocent vis-à-vis terrorism. Bravo focuses on collective responsibility, including women’s silence over the Moro affair.

These examples are only splinters of the numerous issues and facets of 1968 examined by Bravo. They have probably caught my attention because they resonate with my own life. Other readers will be captured by other aspects. This is a book that strikes the heart of those who grew up or lived through those years, whether or not they participated in the struggles. This does not mean that it will not speak to later generations: these will find in it a sophisticated yet clear and vibrant account of 1968 and its legacies. Bravo never allows the impressive corpus of international and Italian scholarship she draws on to hamper her agile style. The book will be equally attractive to a specialist readership and the general public.

At a time when the 1960s and 1970s have started to appear on university syllabuses, *A colpi di cuore* will be a useful textbook on an advanced module. Bravo

might consider including a bibliography in a future edition to make it more user-friendly.

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